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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0075

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000184

SIPDIS

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TAGS: KIRF PGOV PHUM PREL ASEC VE IS

SUBJECT: GBRV DETAINS 11 PERSONS FOR ATTACK ON SYNAGOGUE

REF: A. CARACAS 00135

1B. CARACAS 0070

1C. CARACAS 0032

1D. CARACAS 0020

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,  
REASON 1.4(D)

11. (C) Summary: Venezuelan authorities arrested eleven persons over the February 7-8 weekend in response to the January 31 Caracas synagogue attack (Ref A). Five officers and a sub-inspector in the Caracas Metropolitan Police Force, as well as a detective from Venezuela's national criminal police (CICPC), are among the suspects arrested. In the wake of international repudiation of the synagogue attack, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) has softened its tone somewhat toward the Jewish community. In announcing the arrests, President Chavez and other senior GBRV officials suggested that the attack appears to have been an "inside job." Prominent members of Venezuela's democratic opposition and civil society have expressed an outpouring of support for Venezuela's small and beleaguered Jewish community. While the GBRV is now trying to show that it is responsive, Jewish community leaders believe the GBRV's anti-Israel/anti-Semitic rhetoric created a climate that led to the synagogue attack. End Summary.

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GBRV ARRESTS 11 IN SYNAGOGUE ATTACK  
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12. (SBU) The GBRV reportedly detained eleven persons during the February 7-8 weekend for allegedly perpetrating the January 31 attack on Caracas' oldest synagogue. Among the suspects are Corporal Frank Luis Pinate, former bodyguard Edgar Alexander Cordero, Francisco Jose Perez Diaz, Charlys Angelo, and Jose Milla. In addition, a subinspector from the motorized brigade, Luis Eduardo Castillo Guerrero, and CICPC homicide detective Yadira Torres were detained. Among the four civilians reportedly detained were Victor Eduardo Escalona Lovera, Rafael Enrique, Harvey Enrique Colina Mogollon, and Orlando Jose Perez Diaz. The GBRV is reportedly seeking to arrest additional suspects. The 11 arrested are scheduled to be arraigned on February 9.

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GBRV DENIES INVOLVEMENT, ENSURES MORE SECURITY  
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13. (C) Jewish community leaders from the Confederation of

Jewish Associations in Venezuela (CAIV) met February 4 with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro, Maduro's Chief of Staff Temir Porras, Communications and Information Minister Chacon, and Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Maximilian Arvelaez. CAIV Director David Bassan told Emboffs February 10 that the GBRV representatives appeared very concerned about growing international protests during a "frank and hard" meeting. The GBRV officials condemned the attack, pledged to investigate, and promised more security for Jewish institutions. Chacon followed up on February 9. Bassan said the Jewish community leaders reviewed their concerns about anti-Semitism in state media outlets and urged GBRV officials to stop fostering an anti-Semitic climate in Venezuela. They also said the GBRV should not try to drive a wedge between the Venezuelan Jewish community and Israel. Chacon said he instructed state media outlets to desist from anti-Semitic attacks.

¶4. (SBU) In the wake of international condemnation of the attack, President Chavez phoned CAIV President Abraham Levy February 5 and promised to guarantee the safety of Venezuela's Jewish community. While condemning the attack, Chavez also suggested that it might have been an inside job, and demanded that Jewish leaders publicly recant accusations against his government. In a February 8 Venevision interview, Chavez indicated that a former personal guard of an unnamed rabbi might have been involved in the attack. Chavez said, "This government had nothing to do with this (attack). The GBRV is investigating and already has concrete results... The leader of the group is a member of the police and worked as the personal guard of a rabbi. I can say nothing more as this is still under investigation."

¶5. (C) The local media reports that Edgar Alexander Cordero, the former personal guard turned police officer, had

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previously worked for Rabbi Isaac Cohen for over four years. During Justice and Interior Minister of Interior Tareck el Aissami's February 9 press conference, el Aissami stressed that the GBRV is responding quickly to the synagogue attack. He also suggested that the synagogue's two local guards deactivated an alarm system and electric wires on the perimeter wall. Bassan confirmed that Venezuelan investigators believe one of the two synagogue guards conspired with Cordero to facilitate the attack on the synagogue. Investigators are telling Jewish community leaders that the suspects tried to cover up their robbery by making it look like an anti-Semitic attack.

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JEWISH COMMUNITY ENCOURAGED BY SUPPORT  
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¶6. (SBU) Hundreds of Venezuelans gathered in front of the Mariperez Synagogue on February 5, where they held up their national ID cards and sang the national anthem. Many of the participants wore symbolic "Stars of David" and waved the Venezuelan and Israeli flags. Persons attending a nearby pro-Chavez rally reportedly shouted anti-Semitic slurs at peaceful crowd, however. Many Venezuelan individuals and organizations have also expressed their solidarity, sending letters and issuing public communiqus. The Venezuelan Conference of Catholic Bishops condemned the attack in a February 4 press conference. Numerous prominent Venezuelans have also penned op-eds to repudiate growing anti-Semitism in Venezuela. Jewish community leaders told Poloff they have been heartened by the messages of support they have received in the wake of the attack.

¶7. (C) Comment: President Chavez and other senior GBRV officials are clearly responding to the wave of international condemnation of the synagogue attack. While Chavez and Foreign Minister Maduro condemned the attack on February 1, they then implausibly suggested that Venezuela's opposition may have been to blame. Since then, senior GBRV leaders have

met a couple of times with local Jewish community leaders to stress that the government was not behind the attacks, and Chavez and other ministers have tried to appear more responsive in their public statements. Jewish community leaders believe that regardless of the motive of the intruders, the GBRV is at least indirectly responsible for fostering a climate of anti-Semitism. They also believe that some members of the GBRV may scale back their rhetoric for a while, but will likely resume when they believe it is politically convenient. Embassy will continue to stay in close communication with Jewish community leaders. End Comment.

CAULFIELD